

JOHN MacBRIDE AND MICHAEL O'HANRAHAN



The Jacob's Factory in 1916. GETTY IMAGES

The Jacob's boys

Frank Bouchier-Hayes profiles John MacBride, while Catherine Wilsdon considers the life of Michael O'Hanrahan, both of whom were executed after supporting Thomas MacDonagh in the Jacob's biscuit factory in 1916

AFTER briefly studying medicine, John MacBride worked as a draper's assistant in Castlerea, Co Roscommon before moving to Dublin where he worked as a clerk.

He became involved in the GAA and as a teenager was sworn into the IRB, an oath-bound secret society dedicated to overthrowing British rule in Ireland, by his brother Anthony. In his mid-twenties he was re-sworn into the organisation in London by Dr Mark Ryan.

MacBride left Ireland in 1896 to travel to South Africa and persuaded Arthur Griffith to join him there. As well as working in goldmines, the two men and others organised a 1798 centenary commemoration in Johannesburg that rivalled the event held in Dublin. When the Second Boer War broke out in 1899, MacBride established an 'Irish Brigade' to fight with the Boers against the British. While nominating John Blake, a former US cavalry officer, as commander, MacBride became second-in-command with the rank of Major.

He became a citizen of the ill-fated Transvaal Republic and, after the brigade commander deserted, MacBride took over from June 1900 until its disbandment that September. He then travelled to Paris where he associated with a group of Irish nationalist expatriates led by Maud Gonne. Following a suggestion made by Arthur Griffith, he embarked on an American lecture tour that also involved Maud Gonne. Despite advice from family and friends, MacBride married Gonne in Paris in 1903. Although a son, Seán, was born in 1904, their marriage was not a success and a French court finally granted a separation in 1906.

SNAPSHOT

JOHN MacBRIDE

Born: 7 May 1868, Westport, Co Mayo

Educated: CBS Westport; St Malachy's, Belfast

Affiliation: IRB, Irish Volunteers

Career: Clerk, shop assistant, soldier

Died: 5 May 1916, Kilmainham Jail



MacBride returned to Ireland where he was greeted with a mixture of admiration for his war effort and disdain due to the break-up of his marriage. Advanced nationalists treated him warily due to his alcoholism. Indeed, WB Yeats would later describe him as "a drunken, vainglorious lout" in his poem 'Easter 1916'.

MacBride spoke at a number of nationalist gatherings. In a speech at Bodenstown in 1905, MacBride argued that had the money wasted on parliamentary reform been spent on guns, then they would now be "in a position to add another Republic to the Republics of the world".

On Easter Monday while waiting to lunch with his brother, Anthony, two days prior to his elder sibling's wedding where he was to act as best man, MacBride saw a group of Irish Volunteers at St Stephen's Green. Dressed in a blue suit and spats, and carrying a Malacca cane, he immediately offered his services to Thomas MacDonagh who appointed him his second-in-command.

Unsurprisingly, given his previous military experience, MacBride is said to have shown more initiative and decisiveness than MacDonagh that week. When a shotgun blast went through a ceiling where he was helping others to seize the Jacob's factory, MacBride calmly attended to his unexpectedly powdered moustache and "casually warned the boys to be more careful". He also confessed his sins to a Capuchin priest during the occupation of the factory building. Later while a prisoner at Richmond Barracks, he emptied his pockets and asked another Capuchin to donate the money to the poor and that his rosary be given to his mother.

When the surrender order came through on Sunday April 30, MacBride encouraged the men to escape that they might live to fight another day but to never again allow themselves to be trapped in a building. He himself made no effort to escape.

Following the court-martial at which he was sentenced to death, General Blackader confided to WE Wylie, chief prosecution counsel, that while he had despised MacBride for his activities during the Boer War, "damn it! I'll never think of him now without taking my hat off to a brave man".

The condemned prisoner unsuccessfully requested not to be blindfolded or have his hands bound prior to being shot by firing squad at 3.47am on May 5, 1916.



Frank Bouchier-Hayes is a librarian at UCD and has written for History Ireland and many other national publications.



SNAPSHOT

MICHAEL O'HANRAHAN

Born: 17 March 1877, New Ross, Co Wexford

Educated: CBS Carlow, Carlow College Academy

Affiliation: Irish Volunteers, IRB

Career: Proof reader, journalist, novelist

Died: 4 May 1916, Kilmainham Jail

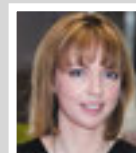


MICHAEL O'HANRAHAN'S role in the Rising can be easily overlooked given the fact that he was not engaged in any actual fighting. However, he did play a crucial role in preparing for the insurrection. A member of the IRB and founding member of the Irish Volunteers, he was secretary of the Second Battalion of the Dublin Brigade commanded by his close friend Thomas MacDonagh. Like MacDonagh, O'Hanrahan was a writer and an Irish language enthusiast. He also contributed to a number of nationalist publications under the pseudonyms 'Art' and 'Irish Reader'.

His keen eye for detail and trustworthy character made O'Hanrahan an invaluable member of the clerical staff at the Volunteer headquarters at No 2, Dawson Street. He was responsible for managing the receipt of large amounts of money and gold from the US and for setting up an insurance fund to assist those who lost their jobs due to their involvement with the Volunteers. Assisted by Michael Staines, he was in charge of the supply and distribution of weapons and provisions in the months before the Rising. Volunteers from across the country visited his home at 67 Connaught Street to procure weapons and during the insurrection his sister Eily aided the distribution of equipment.

O'Hanrahan was second-in-command of the 2nd Battalion under MacDonagh until Major John MacBride joined at Stephen's Green on the first morning of the revolt. The more experienced MacBride assumed a leading role as they occupied Jacob's Factory and strategic outposts over the week. While searching the building for provisions, O'Hanrahan fell down a stairway and, suffering from concussion, was unable to fight. To avoid being sent to hospital, he neglected to inform MacDonagh or MacBride about the incident.

Upon MacDonagh's order to surrender, Michael calmly reasoned with those who protested that continued fighting would only serve to hasten the destruction of the factory including surrounding civilian residences. For his part in the rebellion, O'Hanrahan was tried and sentenced to death. Before his execution, O'Hanrahan expressed his conviction that the Rising would lead to freedom telling his brother: "We may go under and have to suffer the penalty, but in my opinion Ireland is saved."



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